

Papa

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Category: Hairspray

Genre: Humor, Romance

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2007-10-31 05:29:49

Updated: 2007-10-31 05:29:49

Packaged: 2016-04-26 16:53:13

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,546

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Just a regular Saturday afternoon for Link and Tracy Larkin... 2007.

Papa

Tracy Larkin nearly jumped out of her skin when the loud squealing voices of two little girls burst through the French doors leading from the back yard into her kitchen, a split second before their respective owners did. Two dark, pigtailed heads darted around the counter and two sets of baby plump arms wrapped around her legs.

"Grammy, Papa's gonna eat us!" one of them cried while the other one giggled. Tracy laughed. Her husband must've just arrived home because she hadn't seen him yet.

"Really?" she declared. "Well quick, grab some cookies and offer him those instead. Perhaps we can assuage his monstrous appetite!"

The girls jumped into action, full of that energy she so envied these days, and darted back into the kitchen to grab cookies.

"Only two now," she called after them, "the rest are for the party tonight!"

"Yes Grammy!"

She followed slowly after them, listening to the voices drifting in through the open doors on the autumn breeze.

"Roar! I am so hungry!"

"No, Papa, don't eat me! Eat these cookies!"

"Eat cookie Papa!"

"First I'll eat the cookies, and then I'm gonna eat you!"

"No, no!"

"You're all dirty! You've got green paint all over you!"

"Geen paint on you's shirt too!"

Tracy laughed to herself and closed the doors again. No point heating the outside, she told herself, fully aware that she'd heard her mother say the same thing a hundred times. She peeked out through the window and watched her husband chasing the girls around the yard. She smiled and said aloud, "he better not leave that paint ball gear on my patio table or I'll beat him."

She went about her business, finishing up the last batch of cookies. She piled them carefully on her best serving platters and set them aside. When she had finished, she cleaned up her kitchen, making sure it was exactly how she liked it.

Now, she could grab a few moments to read her new book!

She had just turned toward the living room, where a nice smutty romance novel awaited her, when the French doors opened again to reveal her husband. He stood tall on the doorstep for a moment, the low hanging sun casting an orange glow behind him.

His dark hair, only slightly tinged with gray at the temples, was a mess and sprinkled with dust and other debris. His white t-shirt, streaked with dirt and spackled with fluorescent green paint, clung to his still trim torso. He smiled widely at her, looking very alive and vibrant, especially for a man of sixty-two.

"Hello Darlin'," he said and she held up her hand as a signal for him to stop.

"Don't you even think about stepping in this house covered in all that mess!"

"C'mon babe," he said looking down at himself. He shook his head and some of the debris clinging to the close cropped curls fell onto her freshly swept floor.

"Link!" she cried, hurrying across the room to him. She put her hands on his chest and tried to push him outside, but he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her against him.

"Hi," he said looking down at her surprised face. After all this time, his smile had not lost its effect on her one bit â€“ and nor had the feel of him pressed against her if she were to tell the truth.

"You're covered in paintball goo," she said.

"I know," he replied, his voice coarse and dark in that way so familiar to her now.

"You're going to get it on me." Her voice was a bit more breathless this time.

"I'd get a lot of it on you if there weren't two little ankle biters running around in the back yard right now," he said, his smile widening. Then he kissed her; and she forgot for a moment about the dirt and the paint and her nice clean floors, and wrapped her arms around his neck, kissing him back.

"Ow!" he groaned when she squeezed him, and pulled back from her a bit. She looked at him with concern. Turning, he tugged the neck of his shirt down and showed her the dark ringed welt on his back, just below where his shoulder met his neck. She inhaled on a hiss.

"Oh, I hate how bad those things look."

"Well, it was your son who shot me."

"I see, so when he shoots you he's my son, but when he closes a million dollar deal with Sony he's your son."

"Exactly. We both know you're the one with the violent tendencies," he said, yanking his shirt off over his head and tossing it out onto the patio.

"What?" she demanded, watching him bend down to untie his boots.

"Remember that time you savagely bludgeoned that Eagle Scout with a crowbar? And then there was that guy down in Hanover who insisted you punched him in the nose." He looked up at her with a twinkle in his eyes and she put her hands on her hips and gave him her orneriest look.

"Link Larkin! I'll make you regret that." This threat only made him grin even wider and she threw up her hands and left the room.

Link watched her go, pausing in his boot removal to enjoy the sway of her hips as she did so. He tossed one boot out onto the patio with his t-shirt and thought about going after her and dragging her off somewhereâ€¦ then he remembered the two little girls in the back yard and made a face.

He loved his kids and he loved his grandkids, but did they really have to be here all the time? After all, when a man arrived home from a hard day of shooting things and rolling in the dirt to see his best girl in a cute little dress and smelling like cookies, he really only had one thing on his mind.

He tossed the other boot over his shoulder and stood up, looking into the kitchen curiously. In the absence of that howeverâ€¦ he did smell cookies.

He snooped around and found the neatly covered plates piled high with the big, warm, gooey looking confections. He was standing there looking over them appreciatively when Julie and Maddie tumbled in through the doors again. They looked up at him and he put his finger to his lips in a silencing gesture, and then winked at them. Julie smiled and Maddie smacked her pudgy hands over her mouth when she couldn't hold back a giggle. The two girls climbed up onto the bar stools that over looked the kitchen and leaned in on their elbows to watch their Papa.

Raising his eyebrows, Link checked the perimeter and, finding it clear, reached out a hand to pull back the plastic wrap that sealed the delicious looking cookies inside their cocoon.

"Lincoln Edward Larkin, don't you dare touch those cookies!"

Link made a face that said "yikes!" and the girls giggled loudly.

"Uh oh, she used my whole name. I must really be in trouble," he said to them and they nodded emphatically. "What," he called out to his wife, "first you deny me entrance into my own house after a day of being shot at and now you deny me cookies?" he demanded, tossing the girls another quick wink to let them know he wasn't truly angry at their beloved Grammy Tracy.

His wife didn't holler back but appeared gracefully from around the corner. "Getting shot at was your idea, and you already had two. I sent the girls out with them."

"We ate 'um," Maddie declared and received an elbow poke from her sister.

"Papa lets us have them because we captured him and put him in our zoo."

"To the victors go the spoils," Link said with a shrug.

"Well, in that caseâ€|" Tracy said coming forward to wrap an arm around him, gently caressing his bare lower back. "I suppose you may take two for yourself, but no more. These are for Maybelle's birthday party tonight."

Link paused halfway through his grab for the cookies. "That's tonight? Crap, I forgot."

"You didn't forget to pick up her presentâ€|"

Link took an enormous bite of cookie to forestall answering.

"Oh, Link," she said and he mentally kicked himself. He could handle Tracy angry, hell that just turned him on, but when she was disappointed in himâ€| that hurt.

"I've got time, I'll go right now," he said after swallowing.

Tracy just gave him a slow, silent once over with her dark eyes. He looked down at his bare, paintball welted chest and smoothed a hand over his stomach.

"Huh. Well, I still have time. But first... I'll change."

Tracy shook her head as he hurried off and then turned back to the girls. "What's a girl to do?" she asked them.

"Take away his cookie," Maddie shouted on a giggle, bouncing on her three year old arms.

"Forgive him," Julie said, in all her six year old wisdom. "He's Papa."

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